By general consensus Australia’s second prime minister, Alfred Deakin (1856–1919), was the most significant political leader in the decade following Federation. A major architect of the movement towards Federation, Deakin also drove many of the key reforms and policy initiatives of the post-Federation liberal, nation-building project, including immigration restriction, industrial arbitration and tariff protection. His achievements are all the more remarkable considering the general political instability he faced where fluid and volatile party allegiances and minority governments were the norm. Despite these obstacles, the support Deakin was able to gain for these initiatives owed much to his capacity to persuade.

Deakin’s rhetorical ability was one of the most commented upon features of his public life, which stretched from 1879 to 1913, and across colonial politics in Victoria, the 1890s debates over Federation, and the decade following the inauguration of the Australian nation in 1901. Though, as his biographer John La Nauze notes, Deakin privately wished that ‘journalists would say less about his oratory and more about his legislative record’ (1965: 408), it was Deakin’s power to communicate through the spoken word as much as any of his legislative achievements that established his reputation. Deakin was widely recognised as an outstanding figure in an age that placed great value on speech as performance. In Joy Damousi’s phrase he ‘was a product of the world in which he spent his formative years before the turn of the century; a world that was shaped and governed by the Victorian oral culture of listening and speaking’ (2010: 172). According to La Nauze, ‘Deakin possessed most of the attributes of the traditional orator: a handsome presence, a manner that could range from passionate earnestness to light humour without loss of dignity, a rich musical voice best described as light baritone. His speaking was extraordinarily rapid … but his articulation was always perfect; he never hesitated for a word’ (1965: 245–46).

In Australia and abroad, Deakin’s oratory attracted considerable attention. After meeting Deakin at the 1887 Colonial Conference in London, the British liberal politician Sir Charles Dilke described him as ‘the man of greatest promise in all of Australia … a great administrator, a man of extraordinary eloquence and
charm’ (La Nauze 1965: 91). Deakin’s reputation in Britain was only enhanced two decades later by his visit as Prime Minister to the Imperial Conference (1907) where the former secretary of state for the colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, remarked that ‘Mr. Deakin has been the hero of the conference, and his speeches produced a great affect on the public mind’ (Kalgoorlie Western Argus 1907). After hearing Deakin speak in London in 1907 Fabian Ware, the editor of the Morning Post (for which Deakin was the anonymous Australian correspondent for 13 years), was moved to write that ‘Those who were privileged to hear him speak … will never forget the profound impression he created … Those were indeed stirring times when faith seemed to have been restored to politics in England, and great intellects were willing to bow to the inspiration of an ideal’ (La Nauze 1965: 508). And yet another: ‘If you will give us Mr. Deakin, you may have all our leaders’ (Lone Hand 1907). A similar estimation of Deakin’s eloquence was widely held in Australia. For example, the Townsville Bulletin in August 1907 declared:

Mr Deakin is a man for whom Australians of all political parties had much admiration before his recent representation of the Commonwealth at the Imperial Conference. His policy might be condemned; but he always evidently believed wholeheartedly in it, and his skill in supporting it by argument in Parliament or from the platform was ever a delight to the lover of an intellectual contest. He has the oratorical gift more than any living Australian.

A key element in this oratorical gift, according to the Townsville Bulletin, was Deakin’s sincerity:

Mr Deakin’s oratory carries an audience away, because his hearers feel sure that the man so eloquently addressing them thoroughly believes that his proposals are necessary for his country’s salvation. They come away from the experience, either stimulated to assist him in his political propaganda or weakened in opposition to it by the doubt which its advocacy by so obviously able, honest and earnest a man raises.

Deakin’s post-Federation eloquence drew much of its strength from his determined and passionate advocacy of proposals he believed vitally ‘necessary for his country’s salvation’, reform measures that would bind Australians more closely to the emerging nation and which would maximise their good citizenship: encouraging their productive participation in the economy, and their willingness to accept the need for preparedness for war, and the sacrifices that war might demand.

In the decade following Federation, Deakin served as attorney-general and then three times as prime minister. While he had long been recognised as a great
orator, the speeches he gave during this decade, on immigration restriction, the establishment of the High Court, industrial arbitration, tariff protection and defence were profoundly influential in shaping Australia’s cultural and institutional development in the early twentieth century. Collectively, they may be the most influential series of speeches in Australian political history.

These reforms contributed to what is now referred to as the Australian settlement, the liberal, nation-building project of which Deakin was a significant architect, and which has attracted considerable research interest. The literature on the Australian settlement constitutes a recently constructed narrative of twentieth century Australian history, which tends to emphasise the building of a protected and regulated Australian state — a ‘fortress Australia’. This chapter suggests that this view fails to capture an important dimension of Deakin’s vision, as much concerned with building the character of citizens as it was with building strong institutions. Indeed these were two sides of the same project of building the new Australian nation.

Deakin’s narrative of character and citizenship

Deakin well understood that self-government brought a range of challenges that could only be met by expanding the capacities of its citizens. This may seem paradoxical: ‘the language of citizenship’ was, as Alison Holland observes, largely absent from the constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia adopted in 1901. Yet, as Holland adds, the language of citizenship ‘was not insignificant in broader social and political disputes of the period’, and informed the nation-building project that followed Federation (2005: 155–56). Whereas the constitution could rest on defining Australians as British subjects, the active process of constructing government that followed Federation required an active conception of civic participation. From 1901 Deakin appealed to citizenship — which he emphasised as certain qualities of character, rather than a series of rights and entitlements — as the foundation of national strength and ultimately national freedom. While the challenges Australia faced were shaped by the rapid industrial, technological and military developments then taking place within the global order, the qualities of character that Deakin appealed to were ancient ones, namely those civic and masculine virtues of discipline, self-reliance, and readiness to take up arms to defend ‘hearth and homes’ (Australia, Parliament 1907: 7510). Nothing short of this was necessary for the establishment of a

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1 See, for example, Birrell 2001; Fenna 2012; Kelly 1992; Lake 2003; Marsh 2001; Roe 1976; Sawer 2003; Stokes 2004.
2 See also Chesterman and Galligan 1999; Davidson 1997; Galligan and Roberts 2004.
‘free people’. This is perhaps no more succinctly stated than in his 1907 speech regarding defence, wherein he urged the establishment of compulsory military training:

What we aim at is the maximum of good citizenship, with the spirit of patriotism as the chief motive power of a civic defence force. For always, behind the weapons, behind the organization, behind the gun, there is the man. It is in the character and capacity of its manhood that the real strength and energy of resistance of a people must be found. (Australia, Parliament 1907: 7510)

The masculine nature of the emergent Australian nation is a well-researched theme (Lake 1992). Marilyn Lake has emphasised Deakin’s attraction to the republican ideal of manhood and self-reliance that he saw embodied in the American nation and in some of its great literary figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau (2007a). Moreover, Lake has suggested that the ‘capacity for great oratory was one of the masculine virtues Deakin associated with the nation builders of “the great republic”’ (2007b: 50). There is no great surprise in this, since the links between citizenship and oratory have been a feature of the civic republican tradition since ancient Greece and Rome. Lake describes Deakin’s and his (male) contemporaries’ high estimation of rhetoric as a ‘fantasy of male power’. Lake might be right to describe this as a fantasy, but if so, it is a fantasy with an ancient pedigree.

There is no doubt that a central theme of the public culture of Victorian-era Britain and Australia concerned the links between oratory and masculine virtue. Oratory was a vital part of the armoury of the ‘public moralists’ of the period, who were determined to promote both individual and national ‘character’, which in turn was understood principally in masculine terms — a masculinity in service to civic responsibility.

Reflecting on the art of public speaking in 1904, Deakin observed the close relationship between speech making and individual character. In so doing, Deakin provided an insight into how he privileged sincerity, the desire to honestly express deeply held convictions, to lend power to his political narrative and provide the basis of a persuasive civic participation. Indeed, in the art of speech making, what counted above all else was character: ‘It seems, and is a hard saying, but it is profoundly true, that character is the greatest of all sources of influence in speech as in act’ (Deakin 1904: 162). Practice and preparation are undoubtedly necessary for any form of speech making, but

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3 See also Stokes 2004: 12–13; Hearn 2006.
in the end, following rules or precepts has limitations and an over-reliance on such diminished effective speech making: ‘Imitation and rule can only make a mechanical and jejune speaker’. Moreover, ‘A sermon or speech of eminent quality cannot be “prepared,” in the deepest sense of the word, at the time; it is the flower of a life of thought and feeling’. As it was ‘the man behind the gun’ who mattered in the defence of the nation, likewise in oratory, ‘It was the man behind the words that gave them their impact’ (Deakin 1904: 161–63).

Deakin identifies some notable figures whose speeches reflect their individual characters. About the great nineteenth century British statesman and Prime Minister William Gladstone, Deakin wrote that his speeches compelled due to the ‘personal magnetism in his eloquence, and the tremendous motive power of heartfelt belief’; the eighteenth century parliamentarian and philosopher Edmund Burke was the great exemplar of ‘literary oratory and philosophic statesmanship’; the British liberal politician William Harcourt is described as the greatest remaining ‘pillar … [of] the classic school of Parliamentary oratory — dignified but effective, magisterial, courteous, overflowing with the stored knowledge of the student and the man of the world’; Deakin’s Victorian mentor George Higinbotham was said to have ‘had the grand style, great elevation of thought, and a superb delivery reminding me of Gladstone, and, like him, able to sustain flights of impressive potency utterly impossible to lesser men’. The English bishop Charles Gore, whom Deakin heard at Westminster Abbey, though in some respects awkward and stiff, nevertheless possessed ‘tremendous earnestness’ and ‘transcendent sincerity’ which ‘swept all those hindrances out of mind, and at last left the congregation rapt and overwhelmed …’ (Deakin 1904: 162–63). Another who impressed Deakin at first hand was the American preacher Henry Ward Beecher who could speak at great length with few notes: ‘There was no trace of repetition by rote — all was spontaneous; yet there was no flaw in the sermon delivered to 3000 people, who listened to it with an eager silence, rippled only now and then in response to his touches of naïve humour’ (Deakin 1904: 165).

Deakin admired the oration of these figures because their words reflected their admirable if diverse characters. They embodied ethos, or character, which, along with pathos and logos, was one of the key ingredients that Aristotle identified as vital to the art of rhetoric.5 As many of the witnesses to his oratory attest, Deakin likewise was an exemplar of this quality. Deakin’s post-Federation speeches reveal how one of Australia’s most important public figures drew upon his character, as expressed in the performance of public speaking, to help shape the terms of the emerging nation.

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5 These three modes of persuasion (pisteis) can be defined in the following way: ethos — the character of the speaker; pathos — the emotional state of the audience; logos — the argument of the speech. See Aristotle 1991: 1356a. For further discussion see Rapp 2010.
Deakin’s nation-building narrative

James Curran has observed the role of recent Australian prime ministers in defining a sense of national identity and purpose (2004). Deakin’s role in establishing a national narrative is now neglected and since the publication of La Nauze’s 1965 biography, research on Deakin has often focused on his formative experiences and inner life. Yet public narrative fulfils a vital function in the formation of action and identity. Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson argue that ‘… stories guide action … people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that “experience” is constituted through narratives.’ On behalf of the Australian people, Deakin engaged in an elaborate sense-making narrative that validated new policy measures: establishing their relationship with key notions of Australian nation-building and the freedom of citizens of the new Commonwealth, binding subjects to a ‘truth’ of the nation they shared together as an imagined community (Anderson 1991: 6–7).

In the context of late-nineteenth century liberalism, freedom was, as Patrick Joyce describes, ‘a formula for exercising power’, ‘the active and inventive deployment of freedom as a way of governing people’. Liberalism cultivated subjects who were ‘reflexive and self-watching’, who constantly monitored ‘the very civil society and political power that are at once the guarantee of freedom and its threat’ (Joyce 2003: 4). As Deakin’s extensive personal papers attest, the prime minister was both the subject and a key interpreter of the liberal rule of freedom in Australia, monitoring his own public conduct and ideals as he helped to define and construct a nation-building project that required the citizen to be active in the organic development of their own government. The subject would be governed not by rigid direction but by the indirect techniques of liberalism, the cultivation of ‘some authority of independent minds’ that would respond to the ‘ever-changing, ever developing needs and forms of unfoldment in society’, as Deakin explained when introducing the conciliation and arbitration legislation to Parliament in 1903 (Australia, Parliament 1903: 2863).

Deakin’s reference to ‘some authority of independent minds’ echoed the influence of the thinkers who influenced him, and whose work he voraciously read, including the American philosopher and psychologist William James (Hearn 2008: 204). In The Pluralistic Universe James argued that ‘[t]he pluralistic world is thus more like a federalistic republic than like an empire or a kingdom.

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However much may be collected, however much may report itself as present at any effective centre of consciousness or action, something else is self-governed and absent and unreduced to unity’ (1996: 321–22).

This is the dynamic at the heart of Deakinite liberalism, and is reflected in his speeches. Liberalism seeks to create that ‘absent’ space for self-government, but in doing so generates ambiguity and tension; as Nikolas Rose observes, in liberalism ‘governable subjects’ must govern themselves, guided only by limited interventions from the state (1999: 42–43). Like many liberals of the period, Deakin was aware of the dangers of overly interventionist legislation, and the way government action could hinder as much as it could enhance the character of its citizens. Echoing the concerns of another mentor, Charles Pearson, Deakin wrote in 1893 that he feared ‘State socialism … mainly because of the weakness of the social idea in us & run by selfishness nothing could exceed the corruption likely to be bred under a system of State Socialism’.8 Despite these dangers Deakin, like Pearson, was resigned to the need for more rather than less state socialism at this time.

The character of the emerging nation and its citizens were governed, in Deakin’s mind, by clear demarcations of gender and race. Industrial relations policy and tariff protection would allow Australian industry to flourish within the young nation, while maximising the productive output of the male workforce: Deakin was concerned to mobilise manhood in order to protect and develop the nation. Defence policy would help police the perimeter of a vulnerable Commonwealth, while disciplining its male citizens to the task of nation-building. ‘It is in the character and capacity of its manhood that the real strength and energy of resistance of a people must be found’, Deakin told Parliament in 1907. In his defence statement Deakin marginalised the role of women. Women might train as nurses, Deakin conceded, but they were primarily required in the home, as a source of ‘patient loving kindness’ in support of their spouses and sons (Australia, Parliament 1907: 7535). Despite the introduction of a universal franchise in 1902, women were significantly excluded from parliamentary politics and workforce participation (Grimshaw 1996: 196–97, 207–08). In Commonwealth policy, women would be relegated to the home to foster their maternal role and on behalf of the nation, a task addressed by the new conciliation and arbitration system under the direction of Justice Henry Bournes Higgins who, in a series of decisions between 1907–20, enforced wage discrimination against women to discourage their participation in the paid workforce (Hearn 2006; Ryan and Conlon 1989).

Deakin sought an idealised unity in his conception of the Commonwealth, a space where white men and women could enact the freedom of self-government, guided by restrained state intervention. Yet his idealised space was colonised by

the anxieties that had helped to shape it, and which Deakin called the citizens of the new Commonwealth to observe and guard against. It was a problem of managing space and population, as Deakin stressed in the immigration restriction debate in 1901 and the Ballarat election address of 1903. Deakin returned to these themes in the defence statement of 1907, when he identified the need to defend Australian territory through compulsory military training and the establishment of an Australian navy.

As Deakin explained in his Ballarat speech, the idea of a white Australia did not simply involve the immigration restriction of undesirable aliens, but represented a far broader and inclusive — for white Australians — conception of ‘protection’ and security: ‘A white Australia does not by any means mean just the preservation of the complexion of the people of this country. It means multiplying our homes so that we may be able to defend every part of our continent. It means the maintenance of conditions of life fit for white men and white women. It means equal laws and opportunities for all, it means protection against the underpaid labour of other lands. It means the payment of fair wages. (Cheers.)’ (Sydney Morning Herald 1903: 7). Moreover, white Australia was a fundamental precondition for securing the unity of the liberal nation, which in Deakin’s mind would also promote a unity of character, as he explained when introducing the immigration restriction legislation in Parliament in 1901:

The unity of Australia is nothing, if it does not imply a united race. A united race means not only that its members can intermix, intermarry and associate without degradation on either side, but implies one inspired by the same ideas, and an aspiration towards the same ideals, of a people possessing the same general cast of character, tone of thought … Unity of race is an absolute essential to the unity of Australia. It is more, actually more in the last resort, than any other unity. (Australia, Parliament 1901: 4807)

The unity of white Australia can be expressed as a problem of ‘security, territory, population’ (Foucault 2007: 108), which animated Deakin’s conception of nation-building. Michel Foucault described ‘governmentality’ as having ‘… knowledge as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument’ (2007: 108). As a form of knowledge, Foucault observed that the word economy originally identified a patriarchal figure who provided ‘wise government of the family’, and political economy took up the idea of governing the state as attentively ‘… as that of a father’s over his household and goods’ (2007: 108). A code of masculine and patriarchal protection runs through Deakin’s national narrative, preoccupied with securing the exposed territory of the Australian nation in order to protect the ‘hearth and homes’ of its citizens, so that they could harmoniously ‘intermix, intermarry and associate without degradation on either
side’. ‘Unity of race’ was an ‘absolute’ essential to securing the population, yet in his Ballarat address Deakin reminded his audience that the territory of Australia was dangerously exposed:

A continent of 3,000,000 square miles, containing nearly 4,000,000 of people, scattered in a fringe upon its outer rim — a country whose increase in the matter of population is extremely small — a country whose birth rate at present is low — a country which we hold, but of which we only occupy a fraction, and of which we as yet use but a minute fraction — these are the fundamental facts to be burnt into our memories and maintained there for the purpose of interpreting what the Commonwealth is and suggesting what Australia ought to be. (Sydney Morning Herald 1903: 7).

Within the zone protected by the apparatus of security provided by immigration restriction and stronger defence measures, Australians could exercise their self-governance, which paradoxically they would be compelled to do by government edict. As Deakin declared in his defence statement: ‘We are a free people, with political equality and sole authority in a country where all have the opportunity to possess homes of their own. Our position as free men in a free country casts on all the responsibility of undertaking our own defence’ (Australia, Parliament 1907: 7528). In words that civic republicans through the ages would have appreciated, Deakin declared ‘the best results from military training are to be obtained in a citizen army exactly in the proportion in which it is a citizen army. When men rally around their hearths and homes simply to safeguard them and those they love, they discharge a duty’. Failure to respond to this call is to risk much more than material possessions:

If we lost the whole of our financial possessions we should miss them much less than if we were robbed of our liberty, constitutional freedom, civilization, and social status … None of us can conceive Australians in serfdom, or subject to an alien rule … we can never forget that what we have most to defend first and last is our national life and ideals more precious than life of the breathing frame. (Australia, Parliament 1907: 7510)

As in policy on conciliation and arbitration and white Australia, liberal self-government and freedom apparently had to accommodate some forms of formal restriction and compulsion.

The regulation of work was also a key site of the tension between self-governance and government intervention, and formed the defining code and hence the most contested space of the political economy of the post-Federation nation-building project. The liberal Australian state had sanctioned, through formal recognition of trade unions and universal democratic franchise, the right
of the working class to industrial and political mobilisation. As Foucault has argued, however, ‘[t]he freedom of workers must not become a danger for the enterprise and production’. So, while ‘[l]iberalism must produce freedom’, it must also establish ‘… limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats’ (Foucault 2008: 64–65). ‘Biopolitics’ makes population ‘a political problem’, which modern government has solved through a network of interventions (Foucault 2003: 243–47).

As the leader of minority ministries reliant on Labor Party support in Parliament to remain in office, Deakin’s administrations introduced instruments of restriction and compulsion to secure Labor support while preserving the essential structure of capitalist enterprise and liberal polity: restriction of non-white immigrants, compulsory dispute resolution imposed on employers and unions, and tariffs — at times at prohibitive levels — on imported products to protect local production and employment. The young nation would develop as a closed economy and culture, within an ‘apparatus of security’, as Foucault characterised this form of liberal governance (Foucault 2007: 108).

In recent decades compulsory arbitration has come to be seen as one of the pillars of the Australian settlement, which has been unravelled as the Australian state has undergone a series of liberalising reforms. Seen through the neoliberal lens, the institution of compulsory arbitration and centralised wage fixation is viewed as an excessive form of state paternalism (Kelly 1992). What is often missed in this analysis is the particular understanding of freedom and civic virtue that was central to the new liberal reforms and is reflected in Deakin’s 1903 speech introducing the conciliation and arbitration legislation. Reflecting the tension between liberal freedom and rule identified by Joyce and Rose, for Deakin the extension of the rule of law into the realm of industrial arbitration undoubtedly involved greater state coercion, but it also represented an extension of the realm of freedom. He famously claimed that this legislation marked ‘the beginning of a new phase of civilization’ that would substitute the reign of law for the reign of violence in industrial affairs. The ‘People’s Peace’ that it would usher in was akin to the medieval transformation of civil society that occurred when warring barons came to recognise the authority of the ‘King’s Peace’ (Australia, Parliament 1903: 7510).

Historians have rightly linked the principles underlying the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration to the critique of ‘freedom of contract’ that was a feature of the new liberal thought of the period, stemming in particular from the idealist philosopher T.H. Green.9 Also worth emphasising

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9 Green’s essay ‘Liberal legislation and freedom of contract’ (1881) is the seminal work. Deakin was well acquainted with this tradition of thought. He was a long-term friend of the leading American idealist Josiah Royce (see Lake 2007a). In August 1908 Deakin attended a lecture given by the Welsh idealist Henry Jones, followed by lunch the next day with the Victorian Governor Sir Thomas Carmichael and Henry Laurie,
here, however, are the civic republican features of Green’s thought, which ties freedom as civic virtue to the restraint of arbitrary power. Citizens can only realise their full capacities, or achieve freedom in the positive sense, when they enjoy the security that comes from restricting the exercise of arbitrary power. Deakin’s project of extending the realm of law into industrial arbitration can be understood in these terms as it entailed the substitution of ‘a new régime for the reign of violence by endowing the State — which in itself possesses a strength greater than that of either or both of the contestants — with power to impose within the limits of reason, justice, and constitutional government, its deliberate will upon the parties to industrial disputes’ (Australia, Parliament 1903: 2868). It would be, he urged, ‘a distinct gain to transfer to the realm of reason and argument those industrial convulsions which have hitherto involved, not only loss of capital, but loss of life, liberty, comfort, and opportunities of well-being’ (Australia, Parliament 1903: 2864). This was a political manifestation of Green’s idea of freedom as:

a power which each man exercises through the help or security given him by his fellow-men, and which he in turn helps to secure for them. When we measure the progress of society by its growth in freedom, we measure it … by the greater power on the part of the citizens as a body to make the most and best of themselves. … the mere removal of compulsion, the mere enabling a man to do as he likes, is in itself no contribution to true freedom. (1986: 199)

According to Deakin in 1907, the process of nation-building was ‘compelled by the circumstances of our time and situation’, and it required a renovation of space and time in order to adjust the Australian community, and the terms of the new nation, to the productive demands of the rapidly modernising early twentieth century (Australia, Parliament 1907: 7510). The demands of modernity intensified anxieties over population, productivity and identity, which the liberal, nation-building project strove to address.

New technologies and the accelerating production of fin de siècle industrial modernity intensified the threat of danger that found a focus in defence policy, expressed in the dilemma of time and situation that Deakin posed before parliament in December 1907: how, with apparently little time before the prospect of war must be faced, and with limited available defence resources, could such an exposed and vast space as the Australian continent be defended?

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9. ‘The maximum of good citizenship’

professor of philosophy at the University of Melbourne. Deakin also replied enthusiastically to a review that Walter Murdoch wrote on J.H. Muirhead’s The Service of the State in 1909 with the following: ‘Bravo! again — Muirhead admirable — Jones ’Idealism as a practical Creed’ — (his Sydney lecture) says the same thing … tho’ he derives direct from Hegel & not apparently from Green’ (La Nauze and Nurser 1974: 36–37, 43; see also Sawer 2003: Chpts 1 and 3).³

10 For discussion of the relationship between Green’s thought and contemporary republican theory see Tyler 2006.
Deakin insisted Australia ‘must keep step’ with the ‘feverish haste’ with which the world’s ‘leading nations are arming’ (Australia, Parliament 1907: 7511; Chandler 1990; Ledger and Luckhurst 2000). Just as other nations equipped themselves with intimidating new military and naval technologies — the battleship, the submarine, the machine gun — so must Australia.

Deakin also observed the intensifying ‘commercial competition’ that was accelerating between rival nations, requiring tariff protection to allow white nationhood to flourish in Australia: ‘We protect ourselves against armed aggression; why not arm ourselves against aggression by commercial means. We protect ourselves against undesirable coloured aliens. Why not protect ourselves against the products of the undesirable alien labour? (Cheers.)’ (Sydney Morning Herald 1903: 7).

‘Aggression’, and the fear of it, reflected the competitive, ‘feverish haste’ of industrial modernity, as Peter Gay has observed: aggression channelled into industrialisation, and manifested in the identification and exclusion of ‘convenient others’, which in the Australian context in the period could be the hordes of Asia against whom Australians must arm themselves (1995: 68, 447). Aggression provided a key metaphor of Deakin’s speeches, overtly addressed in defence policy but also colonising policy in trade, immigration and work. Aggression reached into the productive demands made of men and the discriminations enacted against women, identified as ‘gentle invaders’ of the paid workforce who must be ‘driven’ back to the home (Hearn 2006: 15–20). Deakin masked this aggression under the rubric of ‘the People’s Peace’, which he said would follow the implementation of the conciliation and arbitration Act. The aggression of industrial competition and class conflict would be suppressed — or at least contained — by the elimination of strikes through the intervention of the court, although as Erik Eklund and others have documented, unions continued to resort to strike action following the passage of the Act in 1904, and employer aggression was manifested in lockouts of workers, resistance to union activism and wage claims — including resorting to High Court appeals against industrial awards granted by the Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, a successful tactic that significantly restricted the court’s power in the first decades following Federation (Eklund 2001; Markey 2012: 122; Cockfield 1998).

The workplace, the most contested terrain of Australian political economy, was the space Deakin’s nation-building project was least successful in securing.

Aggression was also an underlying theme within the republican tradition which tied civic virtue to the duties involved in maintaining self-government, foremost among them the readiness to respond to conflict and aggression. Like Machiavelli, for whom virtù consisted in those masculine qualities that enabled rulers to take control of fortune (fortuna) and pursue the actions demanded by
the situation (*necessità*), Deakin well understood that particular measures and qualities of citizenship in the new Australian nation were not optional but were ‘compelled by the circumstances of our time and situation’.11

**Conclusion**

At the end of his essay ‘Public speaking and public speakers’, Deakin observed that the public speaker invariably reveals his inner personality. ‘Consciously or unconsciously,’ he mused,

> a speaker is always revealing himself to those who care to analyse him. He cannot help it. What he says, and how he says it, his arguments, his line of thought, and the motives to which he appeals declare his nature and ideas with trumpet tongue. His voice, his manner, even his choice of words, draw aside the veil of personality in spite of himself. (1904: 165)

The speaker is engaged in what Hannah Arendt termed an act of self-disclosure: ‘In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world … This disclosure of “who” … somebody is — his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide — is implicit in everything somebody says or does’. For civic republican Arendt, political action — the distinctive form of human freedom — is bound up with the ability to communicate through speech. In the realms of ‘labour’ and ‘work’, governed by biological and economic necessity, speech is incidental. But in politics, which assumes plurality among human beings, action and speech are inseparable:

> the actor, the doer of deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words. The action he begins is humanly disclosed by the word … it becomes relevant only through the spoken word in which he identifies himself as the actor, announcing what he does, has done, and intends to do. (1958: 179)

Deakin’s willingness to disclose himself helped to make him one of the most persuasive advocates of the nation-building mission in post-Federation Australia.

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11 We do not suggest that Deakin had an intimate knowledge of Machiavelli or that the Australian Federation was a continuation of what John Pocock described as the ‘Machiavellian moment’. Nevertheless we do know that Deakin had a profound knowledge of classical literature and his famous appetite for reading developed at a young age. According to La Nauze, although Deakin never mastered Latin or Greek he ‘read, in translation, more Greek and Latin literature than most of his contemporaries who performed creditably in classics’ (1965: 1: 18–19). Perhaps the more immediate Italian influences were the founders of the Italian nation, Giuseppe Garibaldi and especially Giuseppe Mazzini, who inspired Deakin in his younger days. See the discussion in Hirst (2000: 7–11). The American republic, as Lake (2007a) has emphasised, was also for Deakin a guiding ideal. In other words, the republican resonances in Deakin’s speeches had multiple sources.
In Arendt’s phrase, this was ‘the enacted story’ (1958: 181) that Deakin guided. Without the component of personality revealed on the public platform, and at least some measure of intimacy shared with his audience, his capacity to frame an effective message would have been seriously diminished.

Despite his eloquence and command of detail, that message did not always persuade; Deakin often faced intractable political resistance. Fighting always from the corner of minority government, by 1910, Deakin was no longer able to fashion an electorally effective coalition behind his leadership. With the advent of a decisively elected majority Labor government under Andrew Fisher in April 1910, the Deakin era was effectively closed. Deakin’s last significant political performances were made as leader of the opposition, in resistance to a nation-building initiative proposed by Labor — the Fisher government’s 1911 referendum proposal to extend Commonwealth legislative power over industrial relations, trade and corporations — the key contested areas of Australian political economy. Deakin’s oratory helped defeat Labor’s referendum proposals by appealing to a negative instinct: denying the expansion of Commonwealth power — an expansion he had often championed, and that had been periodically frustrated by High Court veto of his government’s legislative initiatives. By 1911 Deakin summoned the spirit of liberalism as a warning against the excesses of government power. If Labor’s constitutional amendments were carried, the Commonwealth would ‘… exercise a despotic control over every commercial or manufacturing undertaking in Australia’ (Hearn 2005: 87.4). The nation-building project, in Deakin’s conception, had its limits, and he did not share Labor’s conviction that government should intervene more directly to ease the burden of economic disadvantage experienced by the Australian working class.

Deakin evidently hoped that his oratorical skills would help preserve his reputation as a significant figure in Australian political history. Many great public speakers from the past, as well as contemporaries from across the sea, Deakin observed, can ‘so often come to seem familiar friends … There are few historical personages better known, or at all events more easily knowable, than those to be found in the long line of descent from Demosthenes and Cicero to Gambetta and Castelar’ (1904: 165). Deakin was a worthy successor to this line of descent. By examining Deakin’s key speeches from the post-Federation decade we can learn much not only about the early national project, but much of the character of ‘the man behind the words’ who did so much to shape that project.
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